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SUBJECT: CONGRESS TURNS UP HEAT ON MAYAWATI, SOFTENS ON  
SAMAJWADI PARTY

REF: NEW DELHI 825

11. (SBU) Summary: At the March 30-31 Congress Party Uttar Pradesh (UP) state unit conference, party leaders including Sonia and Rahul Gandhi fiercely criticized the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) government of Chief Minister Mayawati. The gloves came off as Congress Party leaders accused the BSP and Mayawati personally of everything from corruption to abetting inflation. The Samajwadi Party (SP) received its fair share of criticism from Congress as well, but in a measured way that led many commentators to forecast a Congress-SP alliance in the run up to national elections before May 2009. While SP leaders downplayed an alliance, their comments left the door open. Sonia Gandhi also issued a call to action to take back the state, but the party clearly needs a lifeline in UP.

The Congress Party's standing in this large, influential state remains extremely low and the party will need a tie-up with the SP or the BSP if it hopes to form a ruling coalition after the coming national elections. While an alliance with the SP would seem more likely from an electoral demographic standpoint, a Congress MP told visiting SCA Deputy Assistant Secretary Evan Feigenbaum that he thought Congress would ally

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post-poll with the BSP because, "Sonia has a soft spot for Mayawati." If that is true, her words do not show it. End Summary.

Congress Attacks BSP  
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12. (U) At the March 30-31 Uttar Pradesh Congress Party Convention, party leaders including Sonia and Rahul Gandhi fiercely attacked the government of BSP Chief Minister Mayawati on several fronts. They accused Mayawati's regime of promoting corruption, lawlessness, caste-based politics and shielding criminals. The conference resolution read, "To expect transparency and corruption-free administration from the present BSP government is useless. Going by the past record of the present Chief Minister, it is very clear how importance was given to corruption. No department is free from corruption." Rahul Gandhi continued his appeals to the once solidly Congress-voting Dalits of UP, telling them they

have been "cheated" by Mayawati, and that the United Progressive Alliance's programs to improve the welfare of the people were being "sacrificed at the altar of corruption in Uttar Pradesh." The Congress even blamed the BSP for inflation, stating, "Failure of the state machinery is also one of the reasons for the rising prices."

#### Tempered Criticism of SP

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¶3. (U) While the state party conference resolution condemned the SP for the "goonda (crook) raj prevailing under its rule in the state," Congress leader Digvijay Singh softened the party's line towards the SP. When asked about a Congress-SP pre-poll alliance, he responded, "We are open to all parties who are against communal forces in this country. We must give credit to the Samajwadi Party that they have been able to contain the BJP to a greater extent in UP." Commentators immediately took this conciliatory tone to be evidence of an agreement, but SP leader Mulayam Singh Yadav told the press the next day, "Right now we have no plans for any sort of alliance with the Congress." Amar Singh, SP General Secretary followed with, "We will strictly adhere to the

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anti-Congress and anti-BJP politics...there is no question of any tie-up with the Congress in general elections." But he did add, "Mr. Digvijay Singh is an old friend, I respect him a lot," and called the Congress Party "a major secular force" in India.

¶4. (SBU) In an April 1 meeting, a senior Congress MP told visiting SCA Deputy Assistant Secretary Evan Feigenbaum that he thought Congress would not form a pre-poll alliance with either the BSP or the SP. The MP believes all parties will wait until after the election to play their cards. As for post-poll alliances, "Sonia has a soft spot for Mayawati," he conveyed. He also stated that SP General Secretary Amar

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Singh is "very close" to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and theorized that if the BJP is in a position to form a government after the national polls, it will go with the SP.

#### Sonia Scolds, Exhorts Party to Fight

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¶5. (U) While attacking Mayawati at the conference, Sonia Gandhi also criticized Congress party workers in UP and blamed them for the party's decline in the state. She accused party leaders of worrying "more about ourselves than the party" and denounced factionalism stating, "We will all live only if the boat stays afloat." She continued the tough love by excoriating state party leaders for inflating membership roles and told the conference, "Rahul told me very clearly to make it public at the convention." The senior Congress MP told DAS Feigenbaum that he attributed the party's low standing in UP to overrepresentation of Brahmins in state party leadership.

¶6. (U) After the scolding, the Congress Party President exhorted the party members to fight a grassroots campaign by going to the villages and spreading the word of the "historical budget." (Note: This is a reference to the populist budget, including the 15 billion dollar farmer loan waiver program, unveiled by Finance Minister Chidambaram. End Note.) Congress workers must be prepared to "go to jail" to revive the party in the state, she told the conference. Rahul Gandhi will be leading the battle in the streets against the BSP and is prepared himself to go to jail, she offered.

#### Full of Sound and Fury, Signifying...

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¶7. (SBU) Comment: The Congress Party is in deep trouble in

UP. On Poloff's recent trip to UP, local journalists laughed off the party's standing in the state that it used to dominate (reftel). The journalists also considered Mayawati's popularity to be waning somewhat, but felt this was her own fault and not due to the hard work of the Congress. Sonia Gandhi's harsh comments to party workers, while self-serving, were significant in that they were made publicly.

18. (SBU) Comment Continued: The Congress Party is so weak in UP that unless the party aligns with the BSP or the SP ahead of the polls, the "mother and son are in danger of losing their own parliamentary seats," according to one Political Section contact. That said, none of the parties are rushing to form any pre-poll alliance just yet and will wait for the elections to draw closer before they formally commit. But, they are beginning to position themselves. From statements over the last few days, Congress leaders appear to be favoring the SP. This makes more tactical sense as Mayawati plays directly to the Congress's three main vote banks (Brahmins, Dalits and Muslims) and hurt Congress in the Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh state elections. The SP's Muslim and Yadav vote banks, on the other hand, dovetail nicely with Congress's traditional electorate. Congress has turned up the heat on Mayawati, but that will likely moderate once the general election campaign against the BJP starts and both national parties cast about for any partners that can tip the balance. End Comment.

19. (U) DAS Feigenbaum cleared this cable.  
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